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Book Response

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*The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*

Parker J. Palmer

**How can you resolve the paradox of action and contemplation?**

Action shapes our lives; contemplation allows us to see our lives. During the moments in life when we face hard truths, difficult conversations, disparaging opinions, we need to locate calm and plunge forward. Rather than give up in despair or run the other way, we need to journey through the challenges with a reflective mind. Such a journey provides the action of movement coupled with the contemplation of the experience. Through adversity we develop new capacities. Avoiding strife brings nothing new. Ultimately, we must accept that we do not control our world; we are not self-sufficient. When contemplation brings this realization, action becomes more truthful and meaningful. Each of us plays a role in the theatre of life; without one of us, the entire drama is reduced. Our lives are intricately woven together. Living with and through a holistic, interconnected community, we must move in action for the greater good while continually contemplating the results. Replacing up our personal autonomy with a communal identity, we can continue to fully develop.

**The majority of the book talks about the paradox in relation to stories.** *Jesus in the desert highlights the struggle to follow one’s inner truth.*

Just like Jesus, we often face the challenge, both from external and internal sources, to prove ourselves, to demonstrate that we have the requisite skills, to verify ourselves worthy. The quest for power centers on individuals rather than on the collective community. Leaders must be cautious of the siren of power lest they lose their purpose. This temptation can appear without warning. As leaders, we often feel compelled to solve problems; rushing to do so might actually create more harm. Leaders must contemplate the consequences—positive and negative—of intended action. Leaders must be true to themselves; they must uphold their own values. Rather than make a decision to impress others; leaders must act upon their own truths. Ironically, when a leader begins to gain a positive reputation; he/she is in great risk. Consideration of how others will compare an action against the leader’s reputation should never be the basis of a decision. Rather than heed the temptations of the devil, Jesus contemplated his inner truth and acted upon it.